

INTERPRETATION OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE EARLY IRON AGE IN SOUTH-EASTERN POLAND AND WESTERN UKRAINE

ABSTRACT: The present article examines the archaeological record from the Early Iron Age South-Eastern Poland and Western Ukraine by means of migration models elaborated by R. Prien. The analysis shows that at the studied territory a migration might have taken place and it might have a twofold character: of a mass or elite migration (West-Podolian group) and a clearance/deportation (Tarnobrzeg group).

STRESZCZENIE: W artykule tym źródła archeologiczne z wczesnej epoki żelaza z pół-wsch. Polski i zach. Ukrainy analizowane są przy pomocy modeli migracyjnych opracowanych przez R. Priena. Analiza ta wskazuje, iż w omawianym regionie możemy mieć do czynienia z migracjami o charakterze zbliżonym do modelu migracji masowej lub elit (grupa zachodniopodolska) i migracji typu deportacja/wygnanie (grupa tarnobrzaska).

KEYWORDS: migrations, Early Iron Age, Tarnobrzeg group, West-Podolian group, nomads.

In South-Eastern Poland and Western Ukraine a number of essential cultural transformations is dated to the early Iron Age (Fig. 1-2). In the 7th century BC, especially in its second half, and in the beginning of the 6th century BC, in the basin of the middle Dniester a new archaeological unit – the West-Podolian group of the Scythian culture – can be distinguished (e.g. Sulimirski 1936; Smimova 1998; 2004). Its rise precedes the disappearance of most of the settlement structures of the Neporotovo group of the Chemoles culture and the Holihirady culture (Smimova 1976; Krushel'nyts'ka 1976: 25-37; 1993b: 56-121). Similarly, the final phase of the Wysocko culture in the area of Podolia and Volhynia (Sulimirski 1931; Bukowski 1966; 1969: 419-447; Krushel'nyts'ka 1976: 45-59; Bandrivs'kyi, Krushel'nyts'ka 1998) is dated to the second half of the 7th century BC (mainly by finds in the Scythian type). In this case, however, it is difficult to explain the cultural sequence between the Wysocko culture and the West-Podolian group, mainly because the range of these two units partially overlaps, similarly as their dating. The disappearance of the Wysocko culture is synchronized with the formation of Lezhnitsa and Cherepin-Lagodiv groups (Krushel'nyts'ka 1976: 37-45, 82-105; 1993a: 158-239). However, signs of crisis are not observed in the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group of

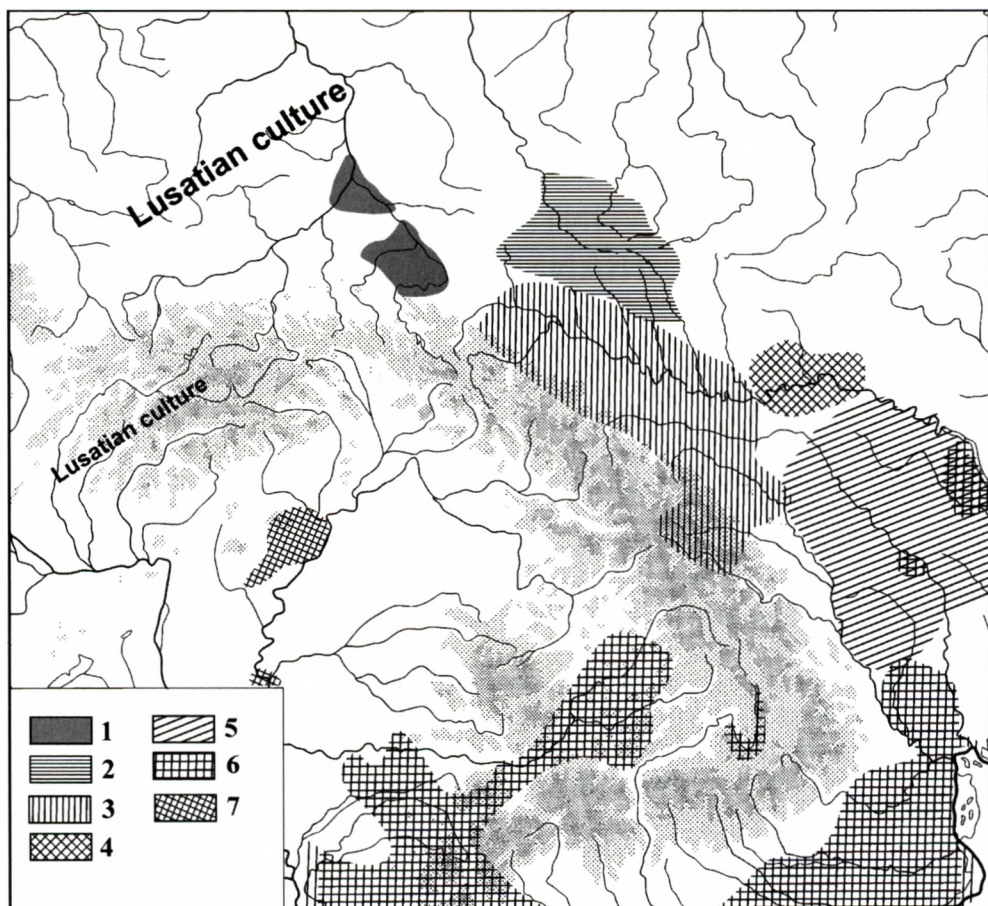


Fig. 1. Cultural picture of territories to the south and south-east from the Tarnobrzeg group range in the 8th century BC. 1 – Tarnobrzeg group (acc. to Gawlik, Przybyła 2005); 2 – Wysocko culture (acc. to Bandrivs'kyi, Krushel'nyts'ka 1998); Holih rady culture (acc. to Smirnova 1976, László 1994); 4 – Neporotovo group, late-Cherno les culture (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka 1998), 5 – Cozia-Sacharna culture (acc. to Kashuba 2000); 6 – Basarabi culture (acc. to Vulpe 1986); 7 – Mezöcsát culture (acc. to Chochorowski 1993)

the Lusatian culture, where many new settlements and cemeteries were founded (Czopek 1996a: 118-119; Przybyła 2004).

The aim of this work is not the detailed description of the mentioned cultures, which are well-known from literature, but an attempt to indicate possible interpretations of reasons for which the archaeologically observable cultural mosaic came into existence. Among scholars dealing with the subject of the early Iron Age in the analyzed area, two opposing and sometimes even excluding views are dominant. These are: the dominant role of migration or acculturation, in this case a kind of combined conception of diffusionism and evolutionism. To take a closer look to the issue, the two biggest and best

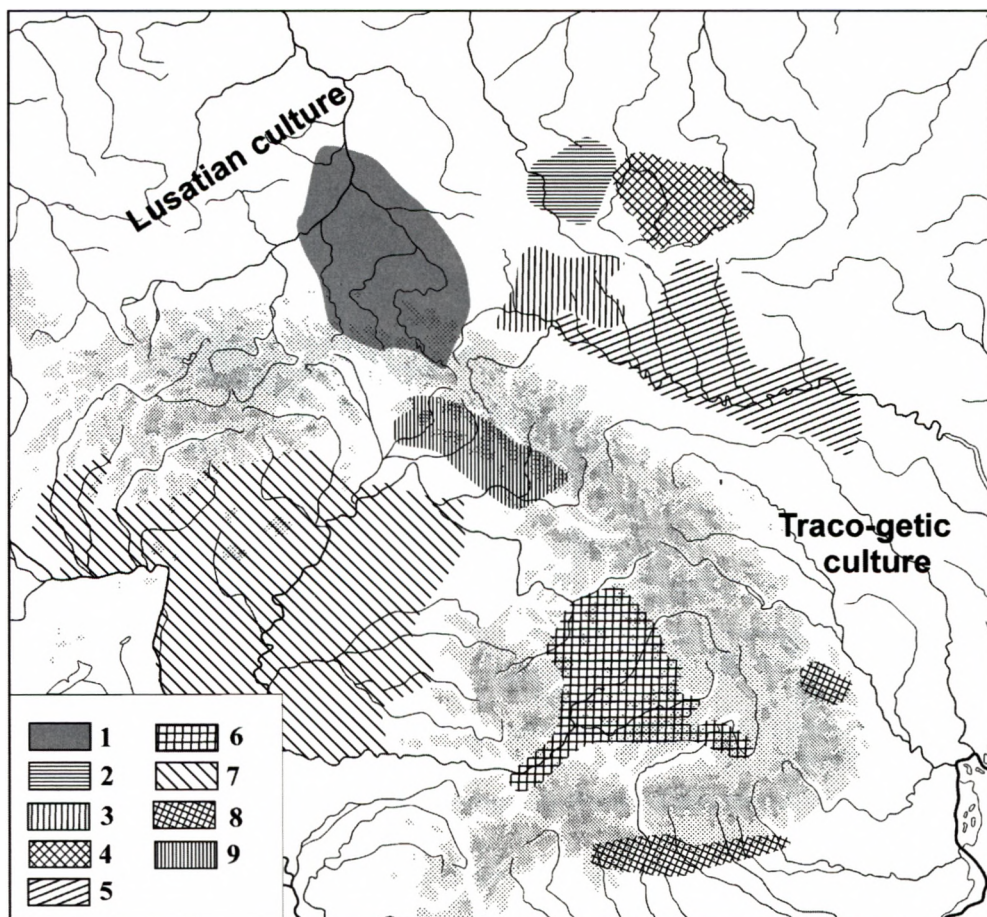


Fig. 2. Cultural picture of territories to the south and south-east from the Tarnobrzeg group range in the 7th-6th century BC. 1 – Tarnobrzeg group (acc. to Gawlik, Przybyła 2005); 2 – Lezhnitsa group (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka ed. 1990), 3 – Cherepin-Lagodiv group (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka ed. 1990); 4 – Mogilany group (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka ed. 1990); 5 – West-Podolian group (acc. to Smirnova 2004, modified); 6 – Transylvania group (acc. to Vasiliev 1980); 7 – Vekezug culture (acc. to Chochorowski 1985); 8 – Birsești-Ferigile (acc. to Vulpe 1967; Morinz 1957)

recognized archeological cultures in the area (the West-Podolian and the Tarnobrzeg groups) will be compared. The analysis of both these units will be based on migration models proposed by Roland Prien (2005). According to this scholar, every migration can be divided into 4 stages and each of them is characterized by a special set of features recognizable in archaeological data. R. Prien divides migrations also into 4 main types: elite migration, mass migration, specialist migration and clearance/deportation. The division will be the base for the identification and description of potential migrations.

The West-Podolian group is a component of a wider phenomenon, known as the forest-steppe zone of the Scythian culture (Il'inskaya, Terenozhkin 1983; Meljukova ed.

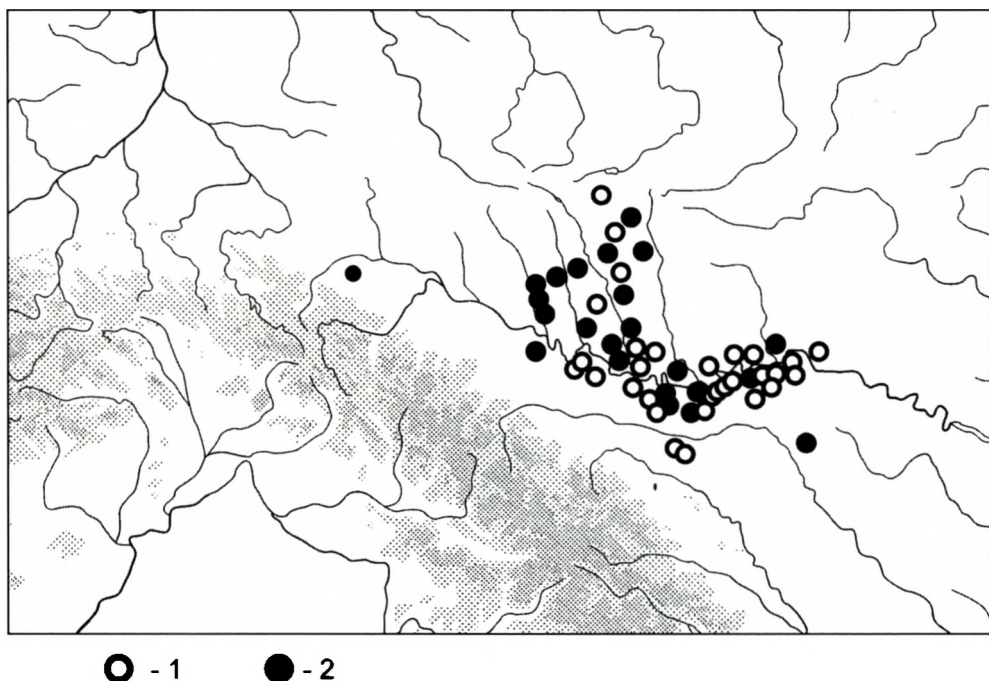


Fig. 3. Distribution of sites of the West-Podolian group of the Scythian culture (acc. to Smirnova 2004, modified). 1 – settlement, 2 – cemetery

1989) (Fig. 3). It is a sequence of local groups living on the premises of steppe and the right- and left-bank Dnieper, dated between the 7th and the turn of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. Their existence is linked to the migration of Scythian tribes from Central Asia to the area of the Black Sea coast steppe (e.g. Eichmann, Parzinger eds. 2001). The problem of the Scythian migration goes beyond the frames of my paper, therefore it will be presented only as a background of a very specific group characteristic – the West-Podolian group.

Roland Prien assumes that to identify migrations in the archaeological material a few conditions must be met, both in the target and the home area. Unfortunately, the Prien's postulate to analyze assemblages from the target area, where single objects from the home area should be present, is in the specific case of the West-Podolian group impossible to meet. The term "Scythian culture" is very wide and was never explicitly defined. In the early Iron Age a significant part of Asian and European steppe was of a very homogenous character in terms of the material culture, that undoubtedly does not translate into ethnic diversity. This leads to the statement that presently there are no clues for precise localization of the region where the group of new settlers could originate from. We can only vaguely point to some nomads from the Scythian circle.

The first stage of migration, that is the stage of contact and reconnaissance, as well as the second one – the migration itself in case of elite and mass migration (that means

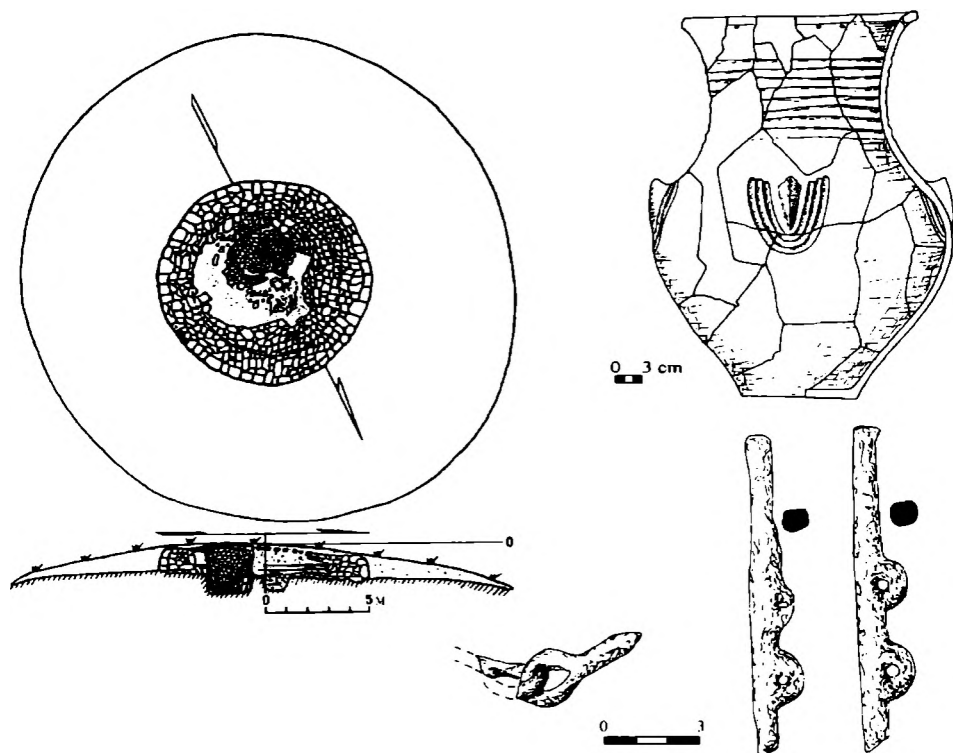


Fig. 4. Loivtsi – barrow of the Neporotovo group the late-Chernoles culture (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka 1998)

voluntary movement of whole communities and tribes) should be characterized by the presence of single objects, mostly the prestigious ones, in local assemblages. In archaeological data, they may be also accompanied by single graves with “alien” equipment and settlement destabilization (layers of damage, disappearing settlement sites). In the region of the middle Dniester basin (that is, the destination one) this stage may be represented by two single burials in Loivtsi (Fig. 4) (Krushel'nyts'ka 1985: 122-125, Fig. 39) and in Lenkivtsi (Meljukova 1953: 60-65, Fig. 28, 29) (Fig. 5). The first of them is a late-Chernoles grave with iron cheekpieces with three loops, characteristic for the early-Scythian assemblages. The second is a tumulus from Lenkivtsi, which is a cenotaph, that is, a symbolic burial with the full equipment of a Scythian warrior and pottery typical for the late-Chernoles culture. It is the earliest assemblage of the West-Podolian group, dated for ca. middle of the 7th century (Smirnova 1993: 105-106). Regrettably, the state of research on settlements of the West-Podolian group is still in its initial phase and any opinions based on these findings are not fully binding. Layers of destruction and fire identified in a fortified settlement in Rudkivtsi are dated on the basis of early-Scythian arrow-heads to the 1st half of the 7th century BC (Gutsal 2000). However, the examination of animal bone remains from the settlement in Neporotiv and Lagodiv points that in the

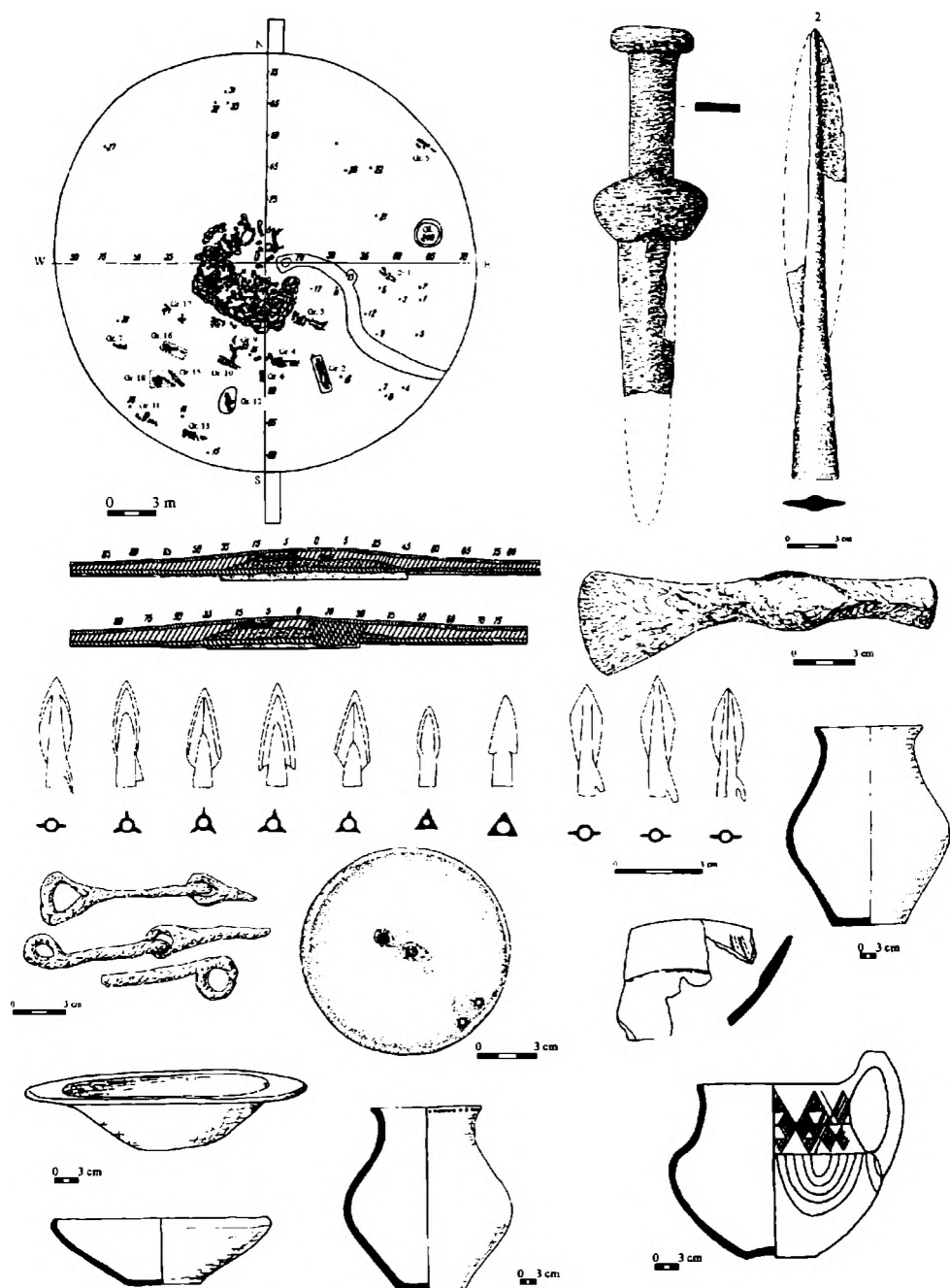


Fig. 5. Lenkivtsi – barrow of the West-Podolian group of the Scythian culture (acc. to Melyukova 1953)

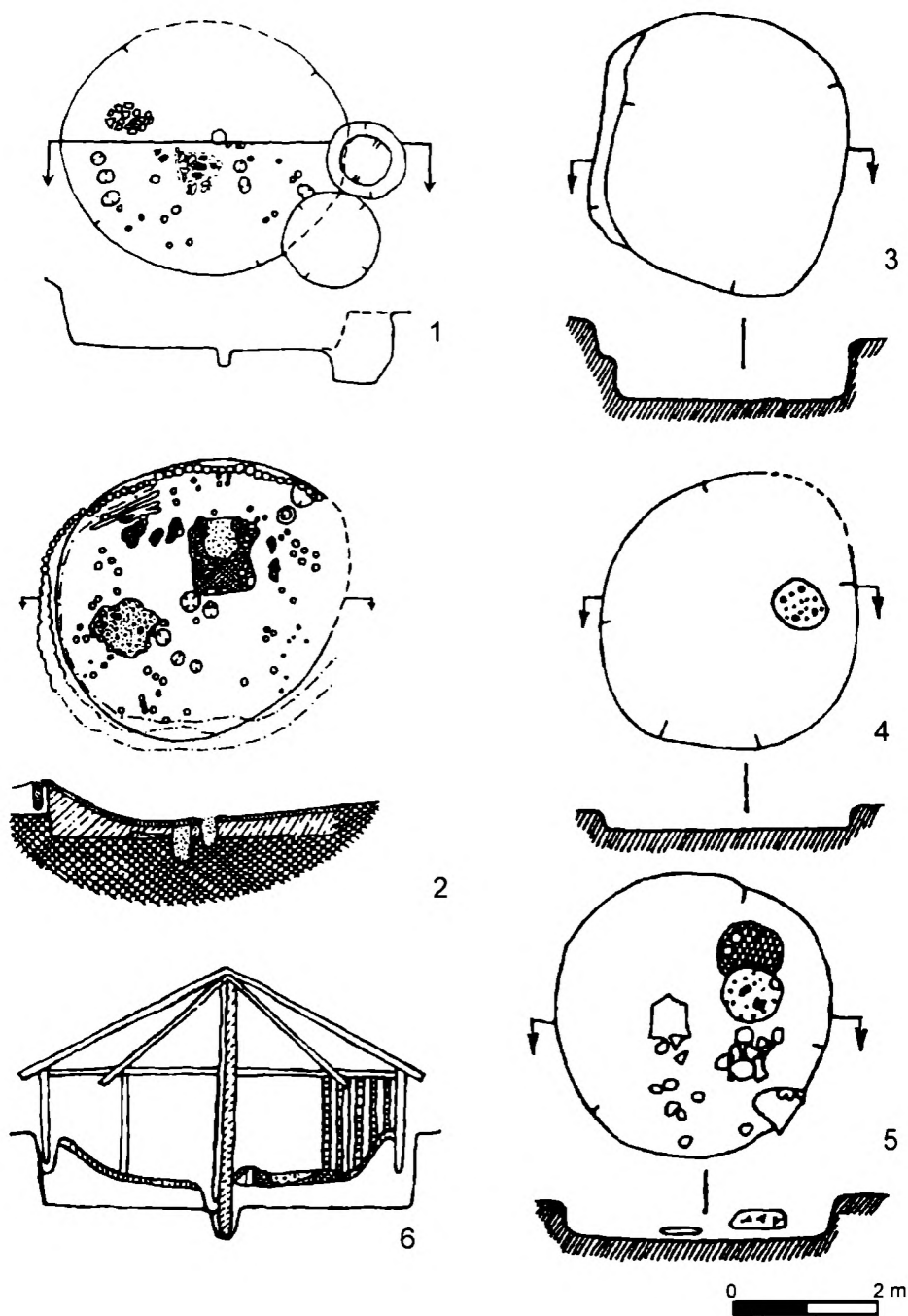


Fig. 6. Remains of round houses – yurts from the settlements of the West- and East-Podolian groups of the Scythian culture. 1-2 – Nemirov, 3-5 – Dolinyany, 6 – reconstruction of a yurt (acc. to Smirnova 2000)

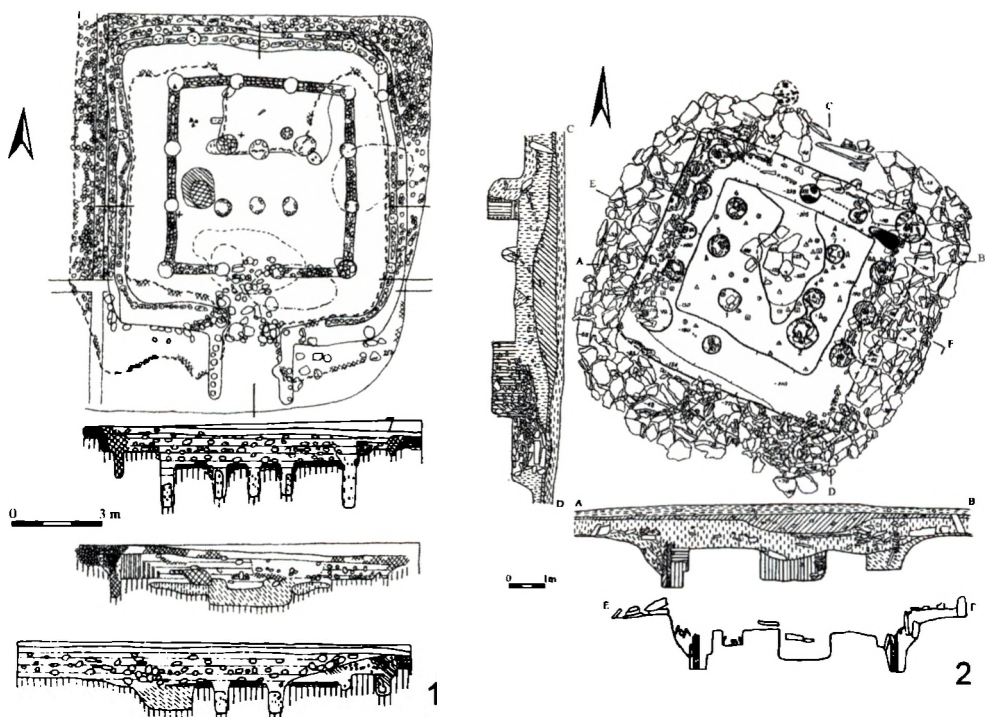


Fig. 7. Kurgans of the West-Podolian group. 1- Perebykovtsy, barrow 2 (acc. to Smirnova 1977), 2 - Dolinyany, barrow 2 (acc. to Smirnova 1979)

late-Charnoles an late-Wysocko structures remains of domestic animals are predominant (sheep, pig, cattle, goat), while in the early-Scythian assemblages the most common are bones of game (deer, boar, aurochs) (Krushel'nyts'ka 1993a: 218-219). This may suggest a certain destabilization and a kind of crisis of economic structures, at least at the early stage of the West-Podolian group development.

At the next stage – in case of mass migration – a number of new occurrences, mirroring structures typical for the target area, is observed. In the event of elite migration, the change is visible mainly as the presence of “foreign” graves and – for example – luxurious pottery and other prestige goods. In the West-Podolian group, occurrence of new cemeteries with burials, pointing to the introduction of a new system of values and social hierarchy typical for the Scythian circle is noted (e.g. Smirnova 1998; 2004). Changes are also visible with the occurrence of new types of dwellings and settlement patterns. The West-Podolian group settling model is partially based on the previous ones. There are, however, only small open settlements and there are no fortified sites known from the Holihirady (Maleev 1988) and late-Chernoles cultures (Krushel'nyts'ka 1998: 197). Moreover, structures representing the new type appeared among others in the settlement in Dolinyany and Selishche (Meljukova 1953: 67, Fig. 31; Smirnova 1978: 31; 1981: 40-41; 2000: 84-87, Fig. 2) (Fig. 6:3-5). They are small, round structures 3-4 m in diameter,

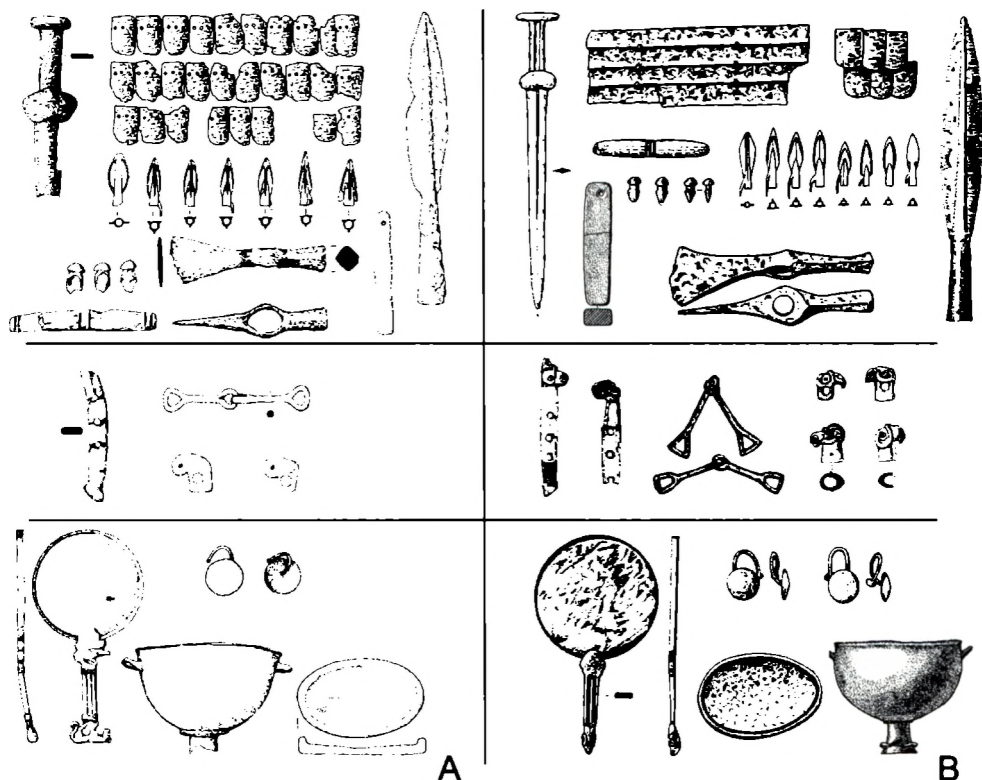


Fig. 8. Materials of the West-Podolian group and inventories from archaic stage of the Scythian culture. A – West-Podolian group (acc. to Meljukova 1953; Smirnova 1977, 1979, 2004; Gawlik 2004), b – archaic stage of the Scythian culture (acc. to Skudnova 1962; Murzin 1984; Il'inskaya, Mozolevskii; Terenozhin 1980; Kossack 1987; Galanina 1997). All drawings without scale

shallowly dug into the ground with traces of hearths and post-holes. The form and shape of these buildings correspond to findings connected to the East-Podolian group (Nemirov) (Smirnova 2000: 80-84, Fig. 1) (Fig. 6:1-2) or the Kiev group of Scythian culture (Skoryi 1996: 8-14). The structures are reconstructed as remains of dwellings in the type of a round shelter-yurt, and so, typical for nomad societies (Skoryi 1996; Smirnova 2000) (Fig. 6:6).

The most distinctive group of sites of the West-Podolian culture are small tumuli cemeteries (Fig. 7). Tumuli were not completely strange for societies of the late-Charnoles culture, however, they are absent in the Holihrad culture (Krushel'nyts'ka 1998: 201-208). Burials of the latter unit are actually an exception, not a rule, and like in the Gáva culture the essential source material is consisted by settlements. Apart from cremation, corpses were beginning to be treated in a new way, that is inhumation, but sporadically both these burial forms could be present in a single grave. A stone and earth tumulus covered a wooden post construction dug into the ground or placed on the surface level. This peculiar house of death often bore traces of fire. Wooden surface structures covered

with tumuli were present in the Scythian circle both in the Asiatic and European zone, such as the Caucasian forelands or the Kiev group (Gryaznov 1980; Il'inskaya, Tere-nozhkin 1983: 18-89; Kovpanenko, Bessnova, Skoryi 1989: 27-36, Fig. 5). The size of a tumulus, its burial chamber and the wealth of offerings – mostly weapon and ornaments – defined the social rank of the deceased. This creates a significant difference in comparison to the previous period, when individual power did not demand this kind of manifestation. All of these lead to the conclusion that in the early-Scythian period the power was centralized and heroes were worshiped. Cemeteries of that time point that an elite of warriors was arising and its members, even after their death, needed prestigious goods and weapons as an obvious symbol of their rank. The West-Podolian group inventory almost completely differs from the material culture of the late Bronze Age units. It is a set of warrior's weaponry and elements of horse harness, decorated in a characteristic, zoomorphic style, and finally women's jewellery and housekeeping equipment. All was typical for the archaic phase of the Scythian culture (Fig. 8). Forms of vessels, in general, refer to the early Scythian inventories of the forest-steppe zone. There are, however, some vessels of the Holih rady or the Charnoles cultures origin also present (Smirnova 1990: 28). Furthermore, a group of vessels strange both for the late Bronze Age and the Scythian traditions appears among pottery – the Greek imports (Ganina 1965: 109-112, Fig. 1:8,10; 1984: 74-77, Fig. 4; Smirnova 1981: 56, Fig. 8:3,8). The presence of a wheel-made ware, in their form referring to local pottery production, confirms that we deal with transposition not only of products but also of their technology itself (Smirnova 1965; 1999; Chochorowski 1996: 135-138).

The final stage of migration comprises of elements of assimilation, when sets and objects of composite character, combining local tradition with the foreign one, appear in the destination zone. Moreover, contacts between societies inhabiting the target and the home area at this stage become obviously closer – imports are clearly more abundant in both areas. This proposed syncretism in the West-Podolian group is observable mainly thanks to pottery and the burial custom form – for example the survived tradition of cremation. All grave assemblages represent the type characteristic for the third phase of the early-Scythian culture, dated to the 3rd quarter of the 7th and the beginning (the 1st half) of the 6th centuries BC (Smirnova 1993; Gawlik 2004: 251-280). There is no grounds for defining any narrower chronological frames, distinguishing assemblages or findings which represent solely the third or fourth stage of migration.

Unfortunately, the lack of specific departure area for the Scythian migration severely limits conclusions drawn from the above-presented analysis. Still it enables to demonstrate the presence of some regularities. There is no doubt, that the rise of the West-Podolian group did not result from the further and unimpeded development of local societies. The ensuing situation is best explained by migration in the mass type, nevertheless, the new migration size in comparison to the previous one (an important factor defining mass migration) is highly inexact. It does not seem that the number of incomers overrated the local population, and what is more, the force of the nomads came from their mobility and war tactics, not simply from their number. The fact that cremation was included in the practiced burial form just in the very beginning of the West-Podolian culture existence suggests a significant number of local people, who were fast acculturated. So the migration itself was of character transitional from the mass to the elite type.

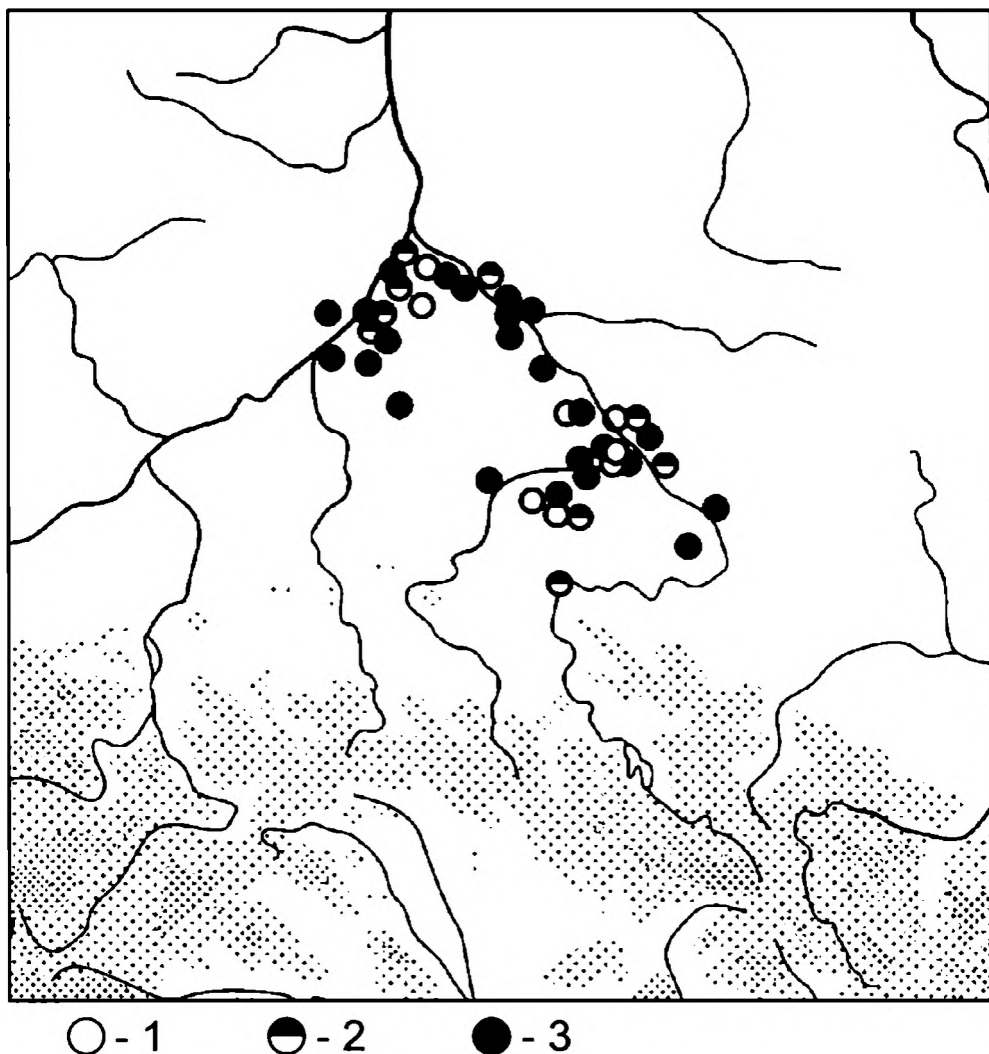


Fig. 9. Major cemeteries of the Tarnobrzeg group. 1 – used in phase I or II, 2 – founded during phase I or II and used in phase III (late phase); 3 – founded in phase III (acc. to Gawlik, Przybyła 2005)

As a matter of fact, R. Prien describes migrations of nomads using examples of the Avars and the Hungarians (2005: 119-152).

The Tarnobrzeg group constitutes a part of the wider circle of the Urnfield culture, that is the Lusatian culture (e.g. Moskwa 1976; Barłowska, Szaląpata eds. 1989; Czopek 1996a; Przybyła 2003; Czopek, Trybała-Zawiślak eds. 2009) (Fig. 9). Its terminal phase is dated to the early Iron Age and it differs significantly from the classical phase of the late Bronze Age. It is the identification of “new” elements that creates the base for

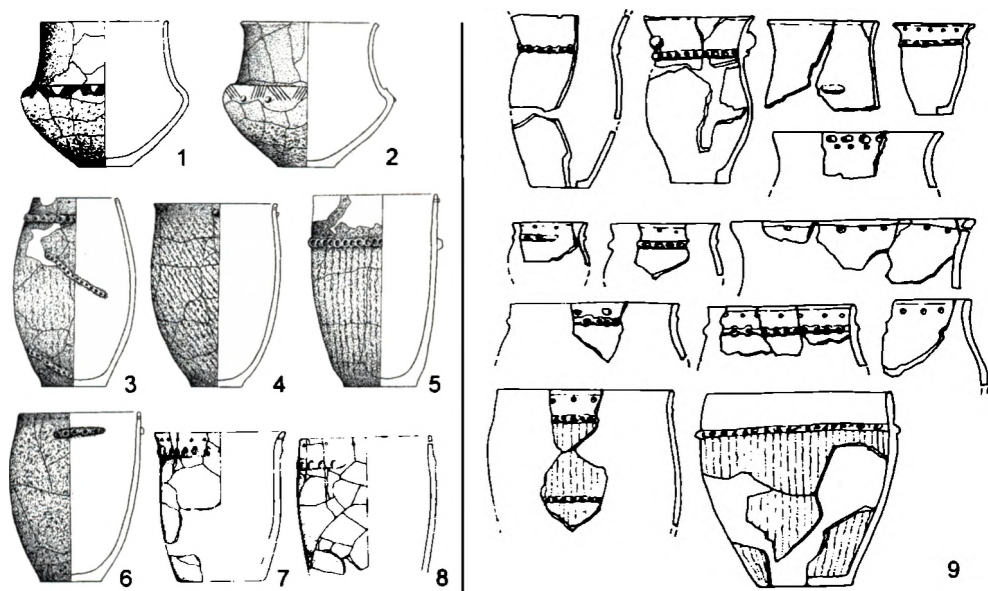


Fig. 10. Pottery of the late (III) phase of the Tarnobrzeg group (1-8) and of the Cherepin-Lagodiv group (9). 1-6 – Knapy (acc. to Czopek 2004), 7-8 – Trójczyce (acc. to Poradyło 2001), 9 – Lagodiv (acc. to Krushel'nyts'ka 1993a). All drawings without scale

further analyses. These novelties are not limited to a single source category, instead, they are present actually in each part of everyday social life. Changes are registered, among others, in settlement patterns. In the late phase, there are large and long-term-occupied settlements completely missing in the earlier periods (the settlement in Grodzisko Dolne, Rzeszów etc.) (Czopek 2004a: 231-236). The difference is that not solely the size of these settlements is increasing, but mainly their number. Settlers entered areas which previously were used to an insignificant or even none degree (Czopek 1996a; 2004a: 235; Przybyła, Blajer 2008: 76-85). This can be explained, among others, by the depletion of environmental resources (in this case: loess uplands) and searching for new ecological niches (great river valleys) (Przybyła, Blajer 2008: 76-77).

Unfortunately, the state of research on settlements disables observation of any important differences in their inner buildings distribution. An exception is created by a *zolnik* from the site no. 1 in Białobrzegi, which is a foreign element in the Tarnobrzeg group environment (Czopek 1989: 242-245, Fig. 1). *Zolniki* are mounds of ashes which remained after ritual activities held on settlements and are known mainly from the forest-steppe and the steppe zones of present Ukraine and Romania, starting from the late Bronze Age (Sava 2005). Similarly, cemeteries also display some differences in comparison to the classical phase, and these changes are not limited only to a different pottery inventory. Numerous cemeteries were founded on the so-called “rough root” (Przybyła 2004; Gawlik, Przybyła 2005: 318-319) (Fig. 9). The intensity of this phenomenon may be testified by the fact that nearly half of large cemeteries of the Tarnobrzeg group

were founded not earlier than in the late phase, and many sites of the Bronze Age were abandoned in the Iron Age. The general layout of burials in cemeteries is also affected by changes when a new tendency for creating dense clusters of graves occurs. Still, the only custom is cremation and burials in urns and differences are restricted to some elements, such as the way an urn was covered (with a bowl or another vessel) or how deep the burials were sank into the ground. The late phase pottery inventory demonstrates many new features: the presence of ovoid pots with roughened surface decorated with plastic bands and perforations below their rim, as well as the lack of forms typical for earlier periods, such as the San basin stylistics (Przybyła 2003). Furthermore, the new pottery style does not display any genetic links to other areas of the Lusatian culture, whereas it shares numerous features with pottery inventories of new units known from West Ukraine: the Lezhnitsa and the Cherepin-Lagodiv groups (Czopek 1989: 247; 2003: 228; Gawlik, Przybyła 2005: 334) (Fig. 10). Sporadically, there are some vessels in the late-Tarnobrzeg group assemblages that display close analogies to, for example, the Basarabi culture (Czopek 2003: 226, Fig. 6:d; Gawlik, Przybyła 2005: 321-323, Fig. 5) as well as in the late-Chernoles or Holih rady circles (Czopek 2003: 228; Gawlik, Przybyła 2005: 326-331, Fig. 6-10) (Fig. 11:1-18). Forms which can be referred to the Wysocko culture (Fig. 11:25-34), or even the West-Podolian group, are also present (Gawlik, Przybyła 2005: 331-332, Fig. 11) (Fig. 11:19-24). Metal findings of the Tarnobrzeg group are mainly small bronze ornaments. In the late phase, nail-like earrings are one of abundant categories of findings (Bukowski 1977). They were discovered both in cemeteries and in settlements (casting mould). This kind of ornaments is known from the Scythian culture, mainly in the forest-steppe zone, where it constituted an element of women's dress (Petrenko 1978: 21-40). Nevertheless, it can be also distinguished in assemblages of the late phase of the Wysocko culture (Bandrivs'kyi, Krushel'nyts'ka 1998: 240-246; Gawlik 2005: 209-213, Fig. 2:h,i, n, o, s-y, Fig. 3:a-g), or, for instance, in the Yukhnov and Milograd cultures – that is in the forest zone (Mel'nikovskaya 1950: 73-74, Fig. 20:8; 1967: 82-84, Fig. 31:7, 8, 10; Alichova 1962; Petrovs'ka 1971: 14; Lashankov 1999: 62-63; Fig. 32:1-7). It is clear that some "Eastern" elements are present in the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group circle, however, they cannot be identified as referring to only one specific archaeological unit.

The above-mentioned remarks enable to state that changes observable in the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group affect many important life spheres of prehistoric society. When adding increasing demographic potential visible in the micro- and macroregional scale, the idea of inflowing new groups of people seems no longer improbable. However, to be fully correct, some other conditions must be also fulfilled – among others, the departure area must be identified. In the 2nd half of the 7th century BC – as the beginning of the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group is presently dated (Czopek 2001: 184; Przybyła 2003: 43) – the only probable area seems to be the North-Western Ukraine, precisely the middle Dniester basin region, where the significant part of the distribution net of settlements of the Holih rady and the late-Chernoles cultures vanishes. It means that part of those people, in the critical situation caused by the Scythian raids and the formative process of the West-Podolian group, probably came to the South-Eastern Poland to find more convenient territories. Therefore in the Tarnobrzeg group range, different communities intermingled at the turn of its classical and late phases. It is characteristic that

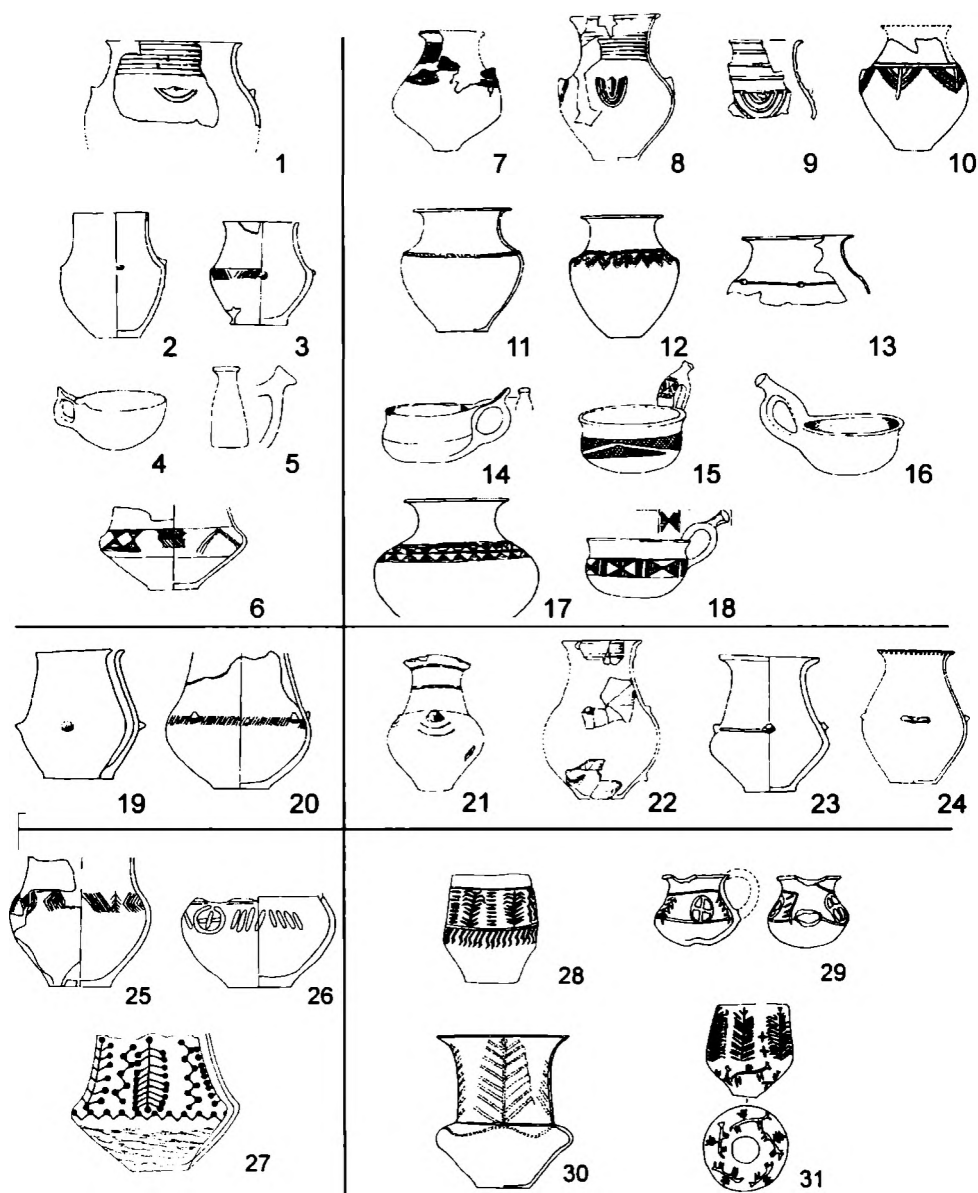


Fig. 11. Pottery of the late (III) phase of the Tarnobrzeg group (1-6, 19-20, 25-27) and its connections with the late-Chernoles culture (7-18), the West-Podolian group (21-24) and the Wysocko culture (28-31) (acc. to Gawlik, Przybyła 2005, see there for further references)

structures typical for neither the Holihrad, nor the late-Chernoles cultures were implied, however, the mixture of many traditions resulted in emergence of a new quality, full of „Eastern” elements, and still an “independent” archaeological culture. It is probable that

the emergence of the Lezhnitsa and the Cherepin-Lagodiv groups should be similarly explained. With this interpretation, participation of the Wysocko culture communities in the formative process of the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group should be taken into account. However, in case of this archaeological unit its disappearance is difficult to link with the appearance of the West-Podolian group. The late phase of the Wysocko culture is characterized by the presence of objects in the Scythian type: these are in general single bronze arrow-heads and the already quoted nail-like earrings (Bandrivs'kyĭ, Krushel'nyts'ka 1998: 240-246; Gawlik 2005). The presence of objects of this kind enable to believe that, at least for some time, communities of the Wysocko culture and the West-Podolian group coexisted side by side. However, the questions regarding how long the period was and whether the end of the Wysocko culture should be dated to the 7th century BC or not earlier than the beginning of the 6th century, together with the disappearance of the West-Podolian group, remain unanswered. It is a substantial issue for the understanding of the process dynamics, but archaeological dating is hardly precise enough to clarify it. What is more, the relatively short time-span, the 2nd half of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th centuries, coincides with a period highly inconvenient for radiocarbon dating, called the Hallstatt plateau (Walanus, Goslar 2004: 66). It raises doubts that carbon dates may also be inaccurate. Analogous problem concerns the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group dating, too.

None of the models presented by R. Prien incorporate all of the above-mentioned elements in South-Eastern Poland. The wide span of changes observed in the Tarnobrzeg group suggests the mass migration type, but the insignificant number of direct analogies with the tradition of the target area points rather to the migration in the clearance/deportation type. Certainly, lack of unanimity with the Prien's models does not exclude the migration itself, since every model is a generalization in some extent. Furthermore, these models were worked out on the basis of migrations in historical times, and so a question arises whether they can be directly applied to prehistory, the Bronze and the Iron Ages in this case.

On the basis of the carried out analysis, it may be assumed that in the half of the 7th century BC a migration took place in the middle Dniester basin region, followed by settling of nomadic groups representing the Scythian model of material culture. The process can be observed in the archaeological data by the disappearance of settlements of the late-Charnoles and the Holihirady cultures and the emergence in a very short time-span – most probably one generation – the West-Podolian group of the Scythian culture. This group is of clearly syncretic character, which indicates that local people also took part in its coming into existence. Nevertheless, the material culture, social and symbolic spheres are dominated by patterns typical for nomad communities – the Scythians.

The settlement and economical crisis in the late-Charnoles and Holihirady cultures circle, as well as the threat of nomads, forced migration to find some more convenient settling conditions. It is supposed that some groups of the Wysocko culture people also took part in the migration. The destination zone was probably the region in South-Eastern Poland, which was occupied during the early Iron Age by communities of the Tarnobrzeg group of the Lusatian culture. Unfortunately, archaeological data do not offer precise answers for questions on the size of migrating groups of people, nor the time when the migration took place, since it could be a long-term process.

The presented analysis and the interpretation based on it emphasize the role of population movements, in particular as a very important factor in the formation of the early Iron Age communities in the area of South-East Poland and North-West Ukraine. The picture is – of course – far from being perfect, since its chronological perspective was flattened and the sources are not evenly recognized. It does not either explain all the transformations observed in the period in question. Nevertheless, it draws attention to the fact that in Bronze Age and Early Iron Age the possibility of population movements should be taken into account – both in the micro- and macroregional scale.

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